

Macroscopic examination of the thyroid and pituitary failed to indicate anything that might have contributed to the bird's condition. However, these glands have been preserved in 10 per cent saline formalin and are available to anyone who may wish to study them further.

Reference:

Ash, J. S. (1960). Dwarfism in a Pheasant. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club.* 81: 95-96.

First-year Starling retaining juvenile flight feathers and comments on post-fledging moult

by R. E. SCOTT

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Unlike the majority of passerines, the Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*, undergoes a complete post-fledging moult commencing in early June, when the grey-fawn plumage of the juvenile is replaced by the adult-like feathers of the first-winter bird. Occasional examples retain a small number of juvenile feathers about the head, particularly on the ear-coverts or immediately above the eye. On 30th October 1964, at Dungeness, Kent, during the routine trapping and ringing activities of the bird observatory, I handled a first-year starling that was in the final stages of moult. All the flight feathers were renewed except the outermost (minute) primary and the innermost secondary; both of which had completed two-thirds of their growth. The exceptional feature of this individual was that the first and third secondaries on the right wing and first on the left wing were retained juvenile feathers (secondary numbering ascendant).

A total of 819 first-year Starlings have been examined at various stages of their moult at Dungeness since 1961, a considerable number being captured on more than one occasion as the moult progressed. Not one of these birds showed any indication of flight feathers being retained, although a certain percentage (nearly 50% in 1964) were not half-way through the moult process when examined. A careful check during September and October 1964, of first-year Starlings that had completed their moult (a total of 209 individuals) revealed that apart from the bird described above, none had retained any juvenile flight feathers.

DISCUSSION

Williamson (1961) states that occasionally the juvenile bastard-wing and up to three secondaries may be retained and records one individual which had retained the innermost tertial, median coverts and secondaries number four to six. Clearly, however, the numbers given above show that the retention of juvenile flight-feathers (tertials, secondaries and primaries) is of unusual occurrence in the Starling. Witherby *et al.* (1940) record complete post fledging moult in only sixteen members of the Passeriformes—eight Alaudidae; *Aegithalos caudatus*; *Panurus biarmicus*; *Sturnus vulgaris*; *S. roseus*; *Emberiza calandra* and three Passerinae. At the present time there would appear to be no clear cut explanation why some species undergo a complete moult from the juvenile plumage, while in others it is only partial. The fact that *Emberiza calandra* is the only member of a large genus to replace all its feathers is particularly interesting. The amount of

moult at this age is by no means consistent within a species, and the instability of this feature provides scope for work upon affinities and evolutionary characters that could be of considerable value to the systematist.

References:

Williamson, K., 1961. Sequence of Post-nuptial Molt in the Starling. *Bird Migr.* II. 43-45.

Witherby *et. al.*, 1940. *The Handbook of British Birds*, London.

Some remarks on an anomalous gull

by JAMES M. HARRISON

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On 20th September 1964 a gull was observed on one of the ballast waters in the Sevenoaks area which it frequented between that date and 5th October.

Its field characters were so extremely anomalous, and as both races of the Lesser Black-backed Gull, i.e. *Larus fuscus fuscus* L., and *L. f. graellsii* A. E. Brehm are regular and common visitors and passage migrants to the water, it was possible to make frequent comparisons under good conditions. As at no time during the above period was it possible to make a definite field determination, it was decided to collect the bird which is a female.

In life the following points were noted; firstly the mantle lacked the intensely black quality of the Scandinavian Lesser Black-backed Gull and appeared to be somewhat lighter than that of the British form of that species, though it was much darker than the mantle of the Herring Gull.

Secondly, and quite the most striking of the field characters presented by the individual was the very dark and heavy striations of the head and neck, and these markings extended on to the breast. In the field, when at rest with its head down on its shoulders, it had the appearance of having a white collar.

In size, in the field, it seemed to be about as large as a Lesser Black-backed Gull. Its bill was yellow with a bright red spot on the gonys, and the legs and feet were putty-coloured. There appeared to be several such individuals, but less strongly marked. This last circumstance finds support in the fact that a bird of this type was observed in the same area during the last three months of 1964.

The problem presented of course as to whether or not one of the eastern forms of the *Larus argentatus*—*L. fuscus* complex was involved.

In view of the lack of such material in this country it was decided to submit the skin to Professor K. H. Voous for his opinion and it was also sent to Dr. Goethe for opinion. Professor Voous studied this bird most carefully and came to the conclusion that it was definitely of no known *Larus* species or race of that genus, in fact he wrote "a gull like yours should not exist, indeed it *does* not exist. Bird watchers should congratulate themselves when never seeing a gull like this: it would give them nightmares, for it is not identifiable." Voous states that its wing is too small for *Larus fuscus heuglini* and the bill is too short and too thin; also that the mantle lacked the dull grey tinge of the North Siberian gulls, and that the striations of the head and neck were too heavy. He points